

Core Team Committee Meeting
State Resource Strategy Meeting
March 10, 2010
Fernan Forest Service Ranger Station
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Attendees:

Coeur d'Alene:

- Dave Stephenson, Idaho Department of Lands
- Ara Andrea, NRCS State Advisory Committee and IDL
- Craig Glazier, Forest Service, Idaho Panhandle National Forest
- Mary Fritz, Idaho Department of Lands
- Ed Warner, Idaho Department of Lands – Forest Legacy Program
- Jill Cobb, USDA Forest Service-IPNF and IDL, Note Taker

Potlatch:

- Steve Kimball, State and Private Forestry: IDL and FS
- Cindy Lane, Forest Service: Clearwater, Nez Perce/ Payette National Forests

Salmon:

- Lynn Bennett, Salmon Challis National Forest, Timber Management/Fuels
- Daniel Bertram, Lemhi County Noxious Weeds
- Gina Knudson, Salmon Valley Stewardship
- Steve Hartmann, BLM Salmon Field Office
- Karin Drnjevic, Lemhi County WUI
- Lyle Powers, Salmon Challis Salmon Challis Forests - Planning
- Russ Bacon, Salmon Challis Salmon Challis Forests – NZ Ranger
- Larry Svalberg, Salmon Challis Salmon Challis Forests – Operations
- Fritz Cluff, Salmon Challis Salmon Challis Forests – FMO
- Jeff Knudson, BLM – Fire
- Jim Tucker, BLM – Fire
- Greg Painter, ID F&G – Salmon

Challis

- Kris Martinson, Salmon Challis Salmon Challis Forests – CYF Ranger
- Bill Blount, Salmon Challis Salmon Challis Forests – FMO
- John Fowler, Salmon Challis Salmon Challis Forests – Fuels
- Ken Rodgers, Salmon Challis Salmon Challis Forests – NEPA

- Doug Hammond, Custer County Emergency Services

Sawtooth

- David Kiesig, College of Southern Idaho

Boise

- Bob Unnasch, The Nature Conservancy

The meeting started at 9:00. As in previous meetings, Steve reviewed the State Assessment and gave the Attendees a quick review of the process and the timeline for completion of the strategy.

Lemhi-Pahsimeroi Area

Dave Stephenson provided the map of the priority areas and reminded the group that the boundaries of the priority areas are not fixed and are in fact very general polygons. He reminded the group about the time period of five years for implementing strategies and asked the group to identify gaps in the existing information. Highlights from the State Assessment for this area include the following: Pockets of high to very high uncharacteristic wildfire, high concern for biodiversity, Air quality is a potential concern near Salmon, high concern for water quality and water quantity, the forest based markets in the north are at risk, development and growth in the Salmon- Challis and Mackey areas is increasing rapidly, there is a concern about the Montana interface along the Idaho border. Dave reminded the group that the statewide resource strategy will be the bridge for funding grants through state and private forestry and the effort will help prioritize work across Idaho.

Steve Hartman (BLM) shared the ongoing Middle Rockies Assessment effort. This effort is being led by the BLM and is a rapid assessment. As part of this assessment, focus areas will be identified followed by strategies for key restoration. This is a regional effort to focus on priority areas and partners for the Middle Rockies Assessment include the USFS, IDL and BLM.

There are Four Northern Great basin plans underway including the Snake River assessment. Beginning in 2010, they will add in other resource values to these assessments including terrestrial and water resources. It was suggested that the Strategy Core Team stay engaged with these ongoing efforts and that they receive updates as they become available. As part of the larger strategy, we need to maintain the ability to share data.

The group shared the coordinated statewide effort to address noxious weeds. The Statewide Weed Strategic Plan is housed at the State Department of Agriculture. We may consider integrating their framework for our efforts.

The strategy should tie into the American Wildlands efforts/plans. It is suggested that someone contact Greg Painter or Jim Rosco. The American Wildlands group could provide maps of all wildlife linkages in the area. Jim Rosco is located in Dillon, Montana.

Lynn Bennett stated that as fire managers, they disagree with the fire assessment for this area. Unlike the assessment, they think their lands are all at high risk for ground fire, not just pockets of areas of concern. Steve and Dave responded that the risks are all relative to one another and explained the data and fire models used in the assessment. These were relative rankings throughout Idaho. It was stated that perhaps as one of our strategies, we need to better risk analysis mapping to capture the fact that while currently insect mortality is not really merged into the overall fire risk, that perhaps it should be. In other words, our layers may understate the risks for wildfire because they did not incorporate the link between tree mortality and increased risk for wildfire. Ara agreed with the groups' comments that standing mortality is extensive in this area and it is very important to refine geospatial map to show higher risk for crown fires. Steve suggested that the fire ecologists work with the State Fire Plan Working Group to upgrade fire risk mapping.

Another commenter from the Lemhi-Pahsimeroi Area said that the Assessment mapping shows that fire is at a much lower risk than what it really is. The forest has other layers including the following: the fire condition regime layer and crown fire risk map. They would be glad to provide these layers to merge into our effort. The vegetative community intertwines with all the other resources we hope to improve. Statewide mapping may not show risk if we actually had an uncharacteristic fire in this area. Dave responded that other resources will cross over with potential fire risk. We acknowledge that there is high quality local fire data and we need to develop strategies to capture this more refined data. This is an interactive process that with each review we can take advantage of better data.

The Forest asked if the base map could be refined in a future meeting sometime this summer or fall. Steve and Dave acknowledged that better data could change the risk for this specific area, but it is important that the effort is consistent throughout the State of Idaho. In other words, unless that data is available for the whole state, then it should not be used in developing the strategy. Still, the group working on the strategy recognizes the challenge that we may be lacking data that is important in assessing fire risks. Cindy Lane suggested that the issue regarding fire data be elevated so that perhaps a strategy could be developed to respond to that need. At a minimum, this data concern regarding fire risks needs to be addressed qualitatively. The bottom line is that the folks in the Lemhi-Pahsimeroi Area are concerned that they will not be able to compete for grants because the data does not reflect their reality. The concerns regarding fire risk will be discussed at June Fire Working Group Committee meeting. For now the strategy will rely on existing data and address reality qualitatively. Perhaps one of our strategies will be to develop an improved fire risk map.

As part of the Middle Rockies Assessment, the mortality risk information will be updated in 2010. Also Steve mentioned that the West Wide Fire Risk Analysis that is being completed by a contractor could compliment our strategy. Larry urged the group to look at history and not just the models. Steve agreed that the models can be limiting. As a group, we need to resolve this concern and look at how we best represent the true fire risks.

Russ Bacon shared concerns from the Salmon-Challis Forest. He stated that for his forest, forest health is a topic that was not mentioned in the assessment for this area, but is very important to them. On the Salmon Challis, they are particularly concerned with the loss of White Bark Pine from Mountain Pine

Beetle and Blister Rust. They are also concerned with wildlife connectivity on the eastern side of their polygon. Air quality is important to Salmon community and the State of Montana. On their Forest, invasive species (i.e. spotted knapweed and cheat grass) are problematic after fires.

Daniel Bertram (Lemhi County Noxious Weeds) shared that while there is some funding available to eradicate invasive species, he would like the threat highlighted to reflect the need for increased funding. His estimate is that currently, there is about 80 million dollars available through the state for weed treatments.

Dave Stephenson addressed the concerns regarding the overall wildlife biodiversity and benefit. In the assessment, the geospatial analysis focused on keystone fish species, threatened and endangered species and big game species. All of these sub-issues were represented in the map and were regarded as important for this area.

Dave was asked how the assessment addressed Douglas fir beetle, Mountain Pine Beetle and the loss of the large tree component across the area. Basically, how is the loss of large trees captured in the strategy? Dave responded that this was looked at for lodgepole, but he was not sure about White Pine. The group asked specifically about the high risk of losing large diameter trees (mature forests) in the Frank Church Wilderness. Apparently, the rate of loss for large diameter trees is very high in this area. The group strongly recommended that to protect the Frank Church Wilderness that the eastern edge of their area needed to have very resilient forests to protect this resource. So the strategy for the Lemhi area should include a heightened priority to have resiliency for the forests to the east.

Greg Painter (ID F&G – Salmon) suggested that we include the upper Salmon River Basin in the priority area. To have a good consistent picture, the strategy should include Stanley because it shares the same conditions as Lemhi and Pahsimeroi. Dave discussed why this did not “flash out” in the assessment as high. While the Stanley area ranks high for biodiversity ranks high in this area, it does not rank as high on multiple issues. Nevertheless, in the qualitative part of the document, we will address the importance of the Upper Salmon. Lyle Powers (SCNF- Planning) suggested that perhaps the assessment missed identifying it as important because of the weak fire risk characterization for this area. In summary, the SCNF folks strongly believe that what happens in Stanley will strongly affect what happens below in the Salmon Area. The SCNF maintained with their strong recommendation to include all of the Salmon River.

Bob Unnasch (The Nature Conservancy) joined us from Boise. Bob thought the Stanley Basin was similar to the lands around the Clearwater Basin....high biodiversity and wildfire but some of the other measures we chose showed lower values (e.g. water quality, air quality). This omission shows some of the flaws with our methodology. Stanley basin is not important for all of the measures we looked at.

Lynn Bennett, (SCNF- Timber Management/Fuels) commented on the relationship of wildfire to biodiversity and aquatics. He strongly feels that if the top of the basin is lost to fire, then we risk losing valuable resources in the bottom part of the Salmon because of increased sediment, etc. If wildlife and biodiversity ranks high in this area, it is inconsistent to not include the upper Salmon with the larger area in terms of fire risk.

The group was asked what strategies currently exist to address salmon and aquatic ecosystems. One commenter said that there is concern with invasive species like quagga mussels. It was also stated that while noxious weeds are a concern in the riparian zones, the agencies are not permitted to use herbicides to stop their spread. Russ Bacon said that there is more focus on treating the non-riparian vegetation. The SCNF is actively working to reduce the risk of fire in the North Fork of the Salmon River through fuel reduction treatments. The SCNF is using strong collaborative efforts to in their ongoing work in the headwaters of the North Fork of the Salmon River. Both the County and the Forests of the North Zone are working collaboratively and they share a long-term road map towards working on North Fork drainage. The group's identified that the next priority place to collaboratively work together is the area west of the Salmon River, next to the community of Salmon. There is also collaborative work going on with the BLM on Aquatic Restoration in the Upper Lemhi area with the emphasis on protecting downstream resources. Currently the aquatic restoration projects are on located on National Forest Lands and private lands, but future projects will include will include BLM managed lands.

John Fowler (SCNF – Fuels) stated that the original County Fire mitigation plan included the Yankee Fork and Stanley and that the Forest is doing lots of work in the area. Currently, the SCNF is working on developing an MOU for some projects located outside of Custer.

Lynn Bennett added that the Mackay area has White Knob Community Water system. With the Lemhi Wildland Urban Interface plan, priority is given to Hughes Creek and the Upper North Fork of the Salmon River. The WUI also highlighted the Jessie Creek watershed west of Salmon where there is ongoing collaborative efforts going on with the BLM, City and County and private land owners.

The strategies for the State effort are largely focused on those areas that have management flexibility. One challenge with Lemhi and Pahsimeroi area is that so much of the SCNF overlaps with Idaho Roadless areas. Because of the Idaho Roadless areas, there are very limited management opportunities.

The group discussed possibly treating areas within the Idaho Roadless Areas. The Upper North Fork of the Salmon is mostly federally managed lands, but the SCNF is exploring collaborative efforts for treatment in the designated Roadless area as well as IDL managed ground in Moose Creek. The collaborative group is trying to move towards large scale restoration.

Gina Knudson (Salmon Valley Stewardship) would like to see the strategy factor in the existence of collaborative groups as a benefit. This is especially valuable now since there is a strong national drive to promote collaboration. She thinks where working collaboratives are established, the strategy needs to provide recognition for those groups. Perhaps a layer could be added to the assessment identifying existing collaboratives and their target areas. To be effective, there should be a clear definition of what is meant by collaboration. Steve responded that existing and potential collaborative groups would be highlighted in the Statewide Strategy.

In terms of ongoing aquatic strategies, the group discussed the Lemhi Model watershed. This BPA funded mission is a joint effort by State and Federal agencies to promote fencing of aquatic habitat and improved road maintenance. Lynn Bennett will provide information and suggested Jeff Lutch at Idaho Fish and Game as a good contact of BPA.

Other ongoing efforts include the Forest stream crossing inventories which will continue to be funded for the next five years. Upcoming surveys will take place in the following drainages: Lemhi, North Fork and Jessie Creek.

The Challis National Forest has several upcoming multiple benefit projects in the following areas: Yankee Fork Drainage, Garden Creek, Bay Horse Area and the Mackay Municipal Water area near the White Knob Area.

The BLM has worked hard on TMDL projects in Lemhi drainage. It is anticipated that these TMDL based projects will continue for the next five years.

Gina' collaborative work through the Salmon Valley Stewardship group is ongoing in Upper North Fork of the Salmon River and the Hughes Creek drainage. These efforts have kept their group busy, but if BLM asks for their help, they will happily participate.

It was discussed by the group that much of the resource benefit fires fell west of the Lemhi Pahsimeroi priority areas. According to the assembled group, there is another 20,000 acres of prescribed burning planned for this general area in the near future. Currently, the plan is to manage fire near the Continental Divide for resource benefits.

The group was asked about any ongoing or future strategies to address future development and/or recreation pressures. The response was that the County Comprehensive plan was recently updated and there is a section to mitigate for natural and cultural resources. The city is also updating comprehensive plan, especially Jesse Creek watershed. By June 2010, the plan will be adopted by Salmon.

There is not a big concern with development in the counties, because less than 8% of the land in the county is privately owned. Still, the private land is very valuable and there is a land trust trying to keep larger agricultural lands intact. Still, there is no concerted effort by the county to limit development.

Asked if there will be a strategy for Sage Grouse, the answer was that the species is warranted but not listed. The land managers may find themselves in a different management world if the sage grouse is actually listed. If the sage grouse is listed, it will change grazing, fire management and affect state management strategies. Right now, everything is simply speculative regarding Sage Grouse.

Daniel Bertram asked about the core group definition for treatment of invasive weeds. Steve said that we are looking at County Weed Management Agreements and stated that weeds are an important issue throughout the state. Weeds are so important throughout Idaho, that weeds will be identified as an issue in all areas. Dan strongly supported that weeds remain as a major issue throughout the state.

Karin Drnjevic (Lemhi County WUI) stated that in the Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP), there is a listing of priority areas. The existing grants require that proposed projects must be within specified distances from existing projects. The Core group will merge in priority areas from the CWPP with the strategy document.

Steve thanked the meeting participants for their assistance and shared the location of the website for the State wide effort. This portion of the meeting ended at 11:00.

TWIN FALLS AREA

David Kiesig (College of Southern Idaho) mentioned that Auger falls was not on the list and that it appeared to be absorbed into the Snake River complex. Dave Stephenson said yes that was the case.

According to Kiesig, water and wildlife are two very important resources in this area. From what he has reviewed, our team appears to be on target with what we are proposing. He is concerned with the existing and proposed wind generation towers and possible impacts from those towers on other natural resources. He wondered if those individuals responsible for the towers plan to mitigate potential effects. No one was aware of any mitigation plans and Kiesig recommended that additional scrutiny was needed to monitor the impacts of wind towers.

According to Dave Stephenson, air quality, water quality, water quantity, development and growth are all ranked high in this area. Dave S. asked David Kiesig if he knew of additional strategies to address existing and future problems. Kiesig felt that the existing plans associated with the WUIs were addressing many of the problems. Still, he felt there was a need to have the management of the farmlands be better interfaced with forests, water use and water quality (e.g. concerns with overuse of fertilizers and other chemical treatments). Kiesig was not aware of any strategies to limit impacts or improve the situation and he was happy to learn that our effort would raise issue awareness.

Discussion regarding the Twin Falls area ended about noon.

CORE TEAM DISCUSSION

The group agrees that there is currently not a clear understanding of the relationship between fire risk and standing dead timber in Idaho's forests. Additionally, this risk is very contingent upon local variables. It is recommended that in our strategy, we encourage the fire group to work closely with the ecologists to get a better idea on the actual risks. Ara emphasized that standing dead timber is a real resource concern and suggested that maybe it should be a "stand alone" resource issue. This issue is important, not just for fire risks, but also for economic issues. Ara asked if this standing dead tree data is available spatially. Dave responded that the data is available, but is limited to Beetle kill data. It is suggested that as one of the potential statewide strategies, that we refine the existing data to include all standing dead timber.

Priority Strategies and Timeline for Implementation

The Core team suggests that we develop an action plan for the main strategies. Bob said he sees that our team is collecting lots of local strategies, but at some point, we need to identify statewide strategies. In our strategy, we will list both statewide and priority area specific strategies.

For the April 1st Meeting, we will discuss common strategies and collectively efficient statewide strategies. Additionally, within the document, there will be a section where each strategy is clearly listed

along with who is responsible and potential timelines. Also in the strategy document, we need to include and explain our annual update process for the Strategy Document. Dave's expectation is that everyone will refer to the larger strategy to pursue their own projects. Do we want to capture all kinds of projects or just those that will involve efforts from the State and Private Forestry function? Steve responded that all interests need to be included with their strategies during the annual updates. The question was raised as to who will be responsible for developing non-state based action plans. Dave does not believe that IDL will or should be responsible for all updates.

Local Collaborative Groups- Key Structure for Implementation

Group agrees that we should have a section showing collaborative groups for Idaho and give contact and coverage areas.

Investing Resources and identifying means to fund priority strategies/actions

Group agrees that in the strategy document, we need to identify pools of potential resources, partners, agencies, organizations and grant resources for each resource.

Meeting State and Private Forestry Nat. Themes, Program Objectives, Performance Measures

The Core Team reviewed the table showing performance measures and agreed that we need to look at each strategy and figure out how we will measure performance and success. Cindy liked the performance measures from the Texas document and suggested that we maybe should use percentages and make them achievable. Question was raised as to how we could measure strategy success and how we will evaluate strategy effectiveness. Bob suggested that for measuring success and/or effectiveness that we look at outputs and outcomes. For example, if we are implementing certain strategies, what do we expect to see changed on the landscape?

Monitoring and Adjusting the Strategy

In the strategy, we need to set up a way to update the strategy. Given the challenge of covering the entire state, we need to figure out how we can efficiently connect with people from distant areas. The Strategy is required to be updated every five years. Some of the team feels that the strategy should be updated every year to reflect changing needs and/or opportunities. It is likely this responsibility for updating the strategy would fall upon the person who takes the State and Private Forestry position. The person who fills this position would also be managing the fire group structure and the Core group as well. As part of their job, they would frequently check in the groups to find out what might be new or what needs to be updated. It is recommended that the person select one month during the year to secure all the updates for the strategy. Cindy worries about lack of funding and whether this needed work would be a priority to complete. All of the involve groups who have assisted with the Assessment and the Strategy realize that money will follow via the strategy. It is agreed that the actual strategy would not be re-written every year. Rather each year a letter would be compiled by the responsible State and Private Forestry person that would update everyone with the latest information. This letter would be sent out to all Core and Stakeholders. Additionally, it is recommended that the Core Team and

Stakeholders meet once a year and share updates. This annual meeting would allow for a check in and documentation of new issues. In summary, it was agreed that we would recommend that the strategy be updated every five years and annually the Core team and Stakeholders would meet.

Follow Up Tasks and Thoughts

- 1) Someone needs to contact Greg Paintor or Jim Rosco from the American Wildlands group. Jim Rosco is located in Dillon, Montana.
- 2) Cindy will check for Statewide Weed Strategic Plan.
- 3) Lynn Bennett will provide information and suggested Jeff Lutch at Idaho Fish and Game as a good contact of BPA for the Lemhi Model watershed
- 4) As a follow up from the other day, Ara shared that 40 million dollars was dedicated for beetle control in Wood River area. According to what Ara understood from Tom Eckberg, the beetle effort would take place on both federal and state lands.
- 5) Make sure to identify all Data gaps needs in our strategy.
- 6) In response to the group's shared desire to share data, Dave S. will set up an FTP site.
- 7) Mary asked about the Eight Core Issues on the State wide list and wondered if this was still important. Steve affirmed that the list is still important and that in the Strategy, it would be described how those Core issues apply to statewide priorities.
- 8) In the Strategy document, there will be a master list by issue that identifies strategies that were suggested.

Notes taken and transcribed by Jill Cobb

Reviewed by Steve Kimball